

Concept, Etiopathogenesis and Management of Shaqeeqa (Migraine) in Greeco-Arabic System of Medicine

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Abstract

Throughout history, Shaqeeqa (Migraine) has persisted as a formidable challenge, causing debilitating pain and disrupting the lives of those it afflicts. It is a recurring headache disorder with significant implications for individuals and society, presenting a considerable challenge. According to the Greeco Arabic System of Medicine or Unani System of Medicine "Su-e-Mizaj Maddi" plays a crucial role in migraine development. It is caused by morbid matters and vapors arising from imbalanced humors, with treatments focusing on eliminating these morbid substances and strengthening the brain. Conventional management relies on pharmacological and non-pharmacological methods, while traditional systems such as Unani medicine offer alternative treatments centered around balancing bodily humors and regimen therapies. This review explores Unani perspectives on migraine, including its etiology, classification based on temperament and location, triggers, and treatment modalities. Unani interventions encompass regimen therapy, wet cupping, hot irrigation, leech therapy, topical applications, and dietary adjustments. Although some Unani therapies show potential in reducing migraine frequency and intensity, further research is necessary to validate efficacy, elucidate mechanisms of action, and ensure safety. Integrating traditional medicine into comprehensive migraine management may provide complementary or alternative avenues, highlighting the need for rigorous clinical trials and integration with conventional medicine to offer efficacious and safe treatment.

Keywords: Shaqeeqa; Migraine; Headache; Sue Muzaj Maddi; Unani Medicine

Introduction

Migraine, a recurrent headache disorder often with a hereditary component, is marked by symptoms like throbbing head pain, nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light, noise and smell. Preceding the headache, some may experience a warning sensation known as an "aura". This condition stems from abnormal brain function, particularly the overstimulation of the trigeminovascular pain pathway, disrupting the balance between excitatory and inhibitory signals. Cortical spreading depression is a significant factor in migraines accompanied by aura.

The prevalence of migraine varies widely. Chronic migraines affect 0 - 5.1% of the population, while anywhere from 11.7% to 16.1% of people experience a migraine within a year. Lifetime prevalence estimates range from 7% to 99%, depending on the study. Interestingly, migraines affect girls more before puberty, but by late teens, women are twice as likely as men to suffer from them. Migraine frequency tends to decrease with age, although some may experience chronic daily headache [1-6].

The impact of migraines goes far beyond the individual. Because they often strike during a person's prime working years, they impose a significant burden on both society and the economy. Migraines can significantly affect a person's ability to work or perform well in education, highlighting the necessity for improved diagnosis, treatment, and healthcare strategies to mitigate their effects [7].

Conventional management of migraine involves both pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatment approaches. Traditional Unani medicine offers alternative treatments focusing on the balance of bodily humors and the use of specific regimens to address the condition. In this review, we aimed to explore the Unani perspectives on migraine and discuss its management strategies in comparison to conventional drugs. We also focused on investigating the current evidence of Unani treatment for migraine and potential research opportunities for future investigations.

Concept of Shaqeeqa in Greco-Arabic system of medicine

Unani medicine, a traditional system of medicine originating from the Greco-Arabic world, offers a unique perspective on migraine. Unani physicians refer to migraine as "Shaqeeqa," derived from the Arabic word "Sheeq," meaning "a part" or "a side," reflecting the unilateral nature of the pain.

Shaqeeqa is described as a one-sided headache caused by morbid matters and vapors arising from imbalanced humors, with treatments focusing on eliminating these morbid substances and strengthening the brain [8]. It lasts for about 4 to 72 hours.

Unani theory attributes migraine to an imbalance in bodily humors, resulting in the formation of "Bukharat-e-Radiya" (morbid matters and morbid vapors). These abnormal substances are believed to irritate the brain and its surrounding structures, leading to the characteristic symptoms of migraine.

Unani treatment for migraine focuses on eliminating these "morbid matters" believed to be accumulating in the body. Additionally, various brain tonics (Muqawwiyat-e-Dimagh) are employed to strengthen the brain and enhance its resilience against such imbalances.

Etiology of Shaqeeqa (Migraine)

Humoral imbalances

The concept of humoral imbalances in the Unani system of medicine is deeply rooted in the philosophy that health is maintained by the balance of body fluids, also known as humors or Akhlat. According to the Unani tradition, there are four primary humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Each of these humors corresponds to different bodily functions and elements, and an excess or deficiency in any of these can lead to disease. In the Unani system, it is believed that the qualitative or quantitative imbalance of these humors can cause illness.

The Unani system also integrates the concept of hormones within its framework of humors, suggesting that these body fluids encompass a wider perspective that includes what modern medicine identifies as hormones. These humors are responsible for growth, repair, energy production, and the preservation of the individual and the species, indicating that their balance is crucial for the metabolic activities of different tissues and systems, thereby maintaining physiological equilibrium [9].

Furthermore, the Unani system emphasizes a holistic approach to health, considering the whole personality in the treatment of disease. It suggests that the real cause of disease is a disturbance in the natural body humors and that the restoration of their balance is essential for maintaining health. This holistic nature of Unani medicine is not only curative but also preventive and rehabilitative, considering the interplay between the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of an individual [10-17].

Management of migraine

Migraine is characterized by a complex array of symptoms beyond headache, including neurological, gastrointestinal, and autonomic symptoms, which are not typically seen in other headache disorders [13]. Migraine is distinct from other headache disorders due to its complex neurological basis involving genetic factors, changes in brain structure and function, and specific patterns of brain connectivity. Avicenna suggests that migraine can be caused by various factors, including humoral imbalances and recommends treatments based on the type of migraine (hot or cold), with most of his treatment approaches being supported by current medical concepts [18-20].

Unani medicine describes migraine (Shaqeeqa) as a condition resulting from morbid matters and vapors arising from imbalanced humors and recommends treatments such as elimination of morbid matter and use of brain tonics [8]. In Unani medicine, migraine is treated by eliminating morbid matter through regimen therapy, Hijama bish shart (wet cupping), Nutool therapy, leech therapy, using topical creams, using brain tonics to strengthen the brain [14].

Ilaj-bit-Tadbeer (Regimen)

Ilaj-bit-Tadbeer (Regimenal therapy) in the Unani medical system effectively treats various musculoskeletal and psychological disorders by modifying the six essential factors of life for maintaining health and disease prevention [21].

Hijama bish shart (wet cupping)

This comprehensive process aims to promote healing, balance humors, and enhance overall well-being through the removal of morbid matter from the body.

Cupping therapy has been used for centuries as a traditional healing practice dating back to ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, and Greeks. It is believed to help in the diversion and evacuation of morbid material from the body, thereby restoring the balance of humor and promoting overall well-being. Cupping therapy is commonly used to relieve pain and muscle tension by improving blood circulation and reducing congestion in the affected area. Renowned Unani physicians like Jalinūs, Al-Zahrawi, Ibne Sina, and others have endorsed cupping therapy for its therapeutic benefits and have provided detailed descriptions of its uses and techniques.

Leech therapy

Leech therapy, also known as Irsale Alaq, has been a mainstay in the Unani system of Medicine for centuries, traditionally used to treat various conditions like severe persistent headaches, mania, and insomnia. Leech therapy involves three main steps: getting ready beforehand, the actual treatment, and caring for the area after the leeches are removed. Supporting this practice, a case series study investigated post-auricular leech therapy on patients who had not responded to conventional migraine medications [22]. The treatment involved placing leeches on the area behind the ear (post-auricular region). Patients meticulously documented their headaches in calendars, recording the number of headache and migraine days, the intensity of headaches, and their reliance on pain relievers before and after two months of therapy. The results were promising, demonstrating a decrease in both the frequency and severity of headaches and migraines, along with a reduction in painkiller use. Furthermore, patients reported an improvement in their overall quality of life. The therapeutic effects observed in these migraine sufferers might be attributed to the potent anesthetic, anti-inflammatory, and vasodilator substances present in the saliva of medicinal leeches, such as *Hirudo medicinalis* [22].

Other methods for management of migraine

Other treatment approaches for migraine include tila, dalk, qotoor, zimad, tadheen, takmeed, and modifications to diet.

- Tila (liniment) involves application of qurs-e-musallas dissolved in Aab-e-Koknar (juice of poppy capsule) over the forehead [15].
- Dalk (Massage) involves massage of the head using a mixture of equal amounts of Roghan Kahu (oil of lettuce seeds) and Roghan Khash khash (oil of poppy seeds). To induce sleep, do massage of head with Roghan-e-Kahu, Roghan Kadu, Roghan Banafsha or Labube saba [15].
- To use the Qotoor (Nose drops) method, Usara-e- Nilofer (Extract of *Nymphaea alba* L.) is mixed with water and put in nostrils as nasal drop (Saoot). Use of Roghan-e-Banafsha (*V. odorata* L.), Roghan-e-Kadu Shirin (*Cucurbita maxima* Duchesne oil), Roghan-e-Nilofer (*N. alba* L. oil) and Roghan-e-Bed Sada (*Salix alba* L.) as nasal drops have found to be beneficial [8].
- For chronic migraine, use of Aab-e-Marzanjosh (*O. majorana* L.) and Rohkan-e-BadamTalkh (*Prunus amygdalus* Batsch oil) as nasal drop have been proved to be beneficial. Use of nasal drop of Roghan-e- Fustaq (*Pistacia vera* L.) after Hammam (Steam bath) is also an effective remedy.
- Additionally, the use of aromatic substances like Kafoor (*C. camphora* (L.) J.Presl), Arq-e-Gulab (*Rosa damascene* Herrm.), Banafsha (*V. odorata* L.), Bed Sada (*S. alba* L.) is effective in treating migraine. As advised by Avicenna, irrigation with Qasaulhamar and Afsanteen (*A. absinthium* L.) boiled in Aab-e-khalis and Roghan-e-Zaitoon (*Olea europaea* L. oil) at the site of pain is very beneficial [8].
- Migraine treatment in Unani also involves topical applications like pastes or poultices (Pasho) and poultice applications (Zimad). A topical nanogel formulation containing the Unani medicinal herb Baboona (*Matricaria chamomilla*) has demonstrated enhanced skin penetration and significant improvement in pain management for migraine, with reduced skin irritation [23].
- Qurs-e-Musallas is dissolved in lukewarm water to form a paste and is applied over the forehead and temporal region. Similarly, the paste of suddab (*Ruta graveoleus*) and naanaa (*Mentha arvensis*) are applied over the affected area [15].
- A remedy of Tadheen (Oiling) is found to be effective in shaqeeqa har, which includes application of Roghan-e-Gul (rose oil) after cooling with ice over fontanel [15]. For shaqeeqa barid, Takmeed (hot fomentation) by salt and saboos-e-gandum (wheat husk) is found to be effective [15].
- Tiryaqe Josbawa Shaqeeqa is also a drug of choice for migraine. The drugs Ustookhuddus (*Lavandula stoechas*) 6g, kisneez (*Coriander sativum*) 4g and six pieces of filfil siyah (*Piper nigrum*) are finely ground with the help of 90 ml water and administered before sunrise [15].
- Safety evaluations of Unani formulations, such as Capsule Shaqeeqa, have shown no significant adverse effects on physiological, hematological, or biochemical parameters in animal studies, indicating a level of safety for their use in treating conditions like migraine [24,25].
- Treatment methods also include the administration of herbal formulations and brain tonics for strengthening the brain (Muqawwiyat-e-Dimagh).
- Qurs (tablet) of Kushta Nuqra Jadeed with Itrifal Kabir 7g or Khamira Gaozaban Jawahar wala 7g with one Qurs of Kushta Marjan Jawahar wala, or Khamira Gaozaban sada 10g with Kushta marjan 64g in the morning and evening and Itrifal Ustukhuddoos 9g at bedtime is found to be effective [15].
- To remove constipation, 7g Itrifal Zamani or 5 tablets of Qurs-e-Mulayyin is taken at bedtime twice or thrice in a week [15].

Diet recommendations

Light and easily digestible food like half boiled eggs, porridge, soup, Chapatti, bean lentils, bird flesh etc. is recommended for patients with migraine. Use of ginger and coconut is also beneficial. Heavy and flatulent diet like fish, oily and fried items, all types of alcohol should be avoided. Alcohol and certain foods like cheese, chocolates, citrus fruits and coffee are known to develop sensitivity for migraine headache [8].

In case of shaqeeqa barid, take easy digestible diets, baiza neem barasht (semi boiled egg) with darchini (Cinnamom) or chooza-e-murgh (chick) cooked with darchini [15].

Conclusion

This review paper explored the Unani perspective on migraine and its management strategies. While additional research is necessary to validate the efficacy of Unani therapies and comprehend their mechanisms of action, it emphasizes the potential of integrating traditional medicine into a holistic approach to migraine management. Future research should prioritize conducting rigorous clinical trials, exploring mechanisms of action, and assessing the feasibility of combining Unani therapies with conventional medicine to offer patients a wider range of effective and safe treatment options.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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